A COMMONPLACE JEST AND ITS CONSEQUENCES---By E. PHILLIPS OPENHEIM

THE hoarse striking of a distant clock broke in upon his meditations. Nine o'clock! His day of slavery had commenced. He laid down the book upon the wooden stall before which it was his custom to linger for a few minutes or two each morning. Something had lodged in his throat; it might have been a sob! He had been so absorbed that he had forgotten where he stood, whither he was bound. It all came back to him with such grim yet facile insistence. London Bridge station, disgorging its crowd of suburban business men, the heavy atmosphere of Bermondsey down the steps below—Bermondsey, with its nauseous odors, its smoked-stained warehouses, in one of which his own stool was awaiting him. It was disillusion, complete, entire—a veritable mud bath after the breath of roses.

For this book had spoken of very different things. It had spoken of heather-crowned hills, of gorse bushes yellow with sprinkled gold; of a west wind, fragrant, melodious, in the pines; of flower-wreathed hedges and blossoming trees; of the songs of birds and the glad murmuring of insects. A dull flush stained his sallow cheeks. For once he had lost his stoop and stood almost upright. It was the one moment of inspiration which seems to be the heritage even of the very meanest creature who ever walks the earth. The spirit of rebellion leaped up in him like a flame. His way lay, as it had ever done, down those fateful steps. Nine o'clock had struck and 9 o'clock was his hour. He ignored it. He crossed the station and entered the booking hall.

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"Then you won't tell me?"

"Won't tell you what?"

"Why you have come here in those clothes and with no luggage. You must have some friends in Lidford."

He shook his head. "I never heard of the place before," he assured her. "I picked the name out from the time table. It sounded like the country and it was a long ways off."

She looked at him with incredulity written in her sedate, beautiful face. "Of course," she murmured," making a pretense at rising. "If you don't want to tell me——"

"Please don't go!" he interrupted in alarm. "It's the truth, really! I know no one there. I only wanted to get away."

"To get away," she repeated thoughtfully. "Do you mean that you have been doing something wrong?"

"Something wrong!" He repeated the words vaguely, with his eyes fixed upon her all the time. She had risen and was looking at him seriously. Her eyes were blue—such a wonderful blue, like the sky which he had been watching lazily all the afternoon, lying on his back in the deep, cool grass and her hair—ah, there was nothing which he had seen so beautiful as that! Then, warned by her obvious gravity, he hastended to reassure her.

"No," he declared, "I have done nothing wrong. I have run away from my work, that is all. I read in a book this morning of the country, of the sunshine and the wind and the birds and —all this." He waved his arm aimlessly about. "I had to come—I couldn't help it."

"You have come from London—here?" she exclaimed.

"Yes!"

"And your luggage?"

"I brought none."

"And your hat?"

"I threw it away. It was a very old, shiny, silk hat, with ink on the bare places. What would you have thought of me wandering about the fields in such a thing? I am bad enough as I am."

He glaced disparagingly down at his shabby black clothes and dark trousers, frayed at the ends, but carefully pressed and cleaned. She shook her head. She was a little bewildered. "I am sure that your clothes are very nice," she said, "and you were wrong to throw away your hat. What are you going to do without one?"

"I have no idea," he answered. "But, then I have no idea what I am going to do with myself, so it really does't matter, does it?"

"I think," she said, deliberately, "that you are the very queerest person I ever met. Do go on talking to me! Tell me some more about—yourself."

"There is nothing interesting to tell," he assured her, a little wearily. "I would rather listen to you. Tell me some more about the birds."

She shook her head impatiently.

"What is your name, please?" she asked.

"Stephen Marwood," he answered. "I am an orphan and a clerk in a warehouse. I get twenty-five shillings a week and I add up figures and make out invoices from 9 till 6 in a cellar with the gas burning all the time. I live in a long, ugly street, surrounded by miles of other streets. I am just one of a million. I work and I sleep, and I work again, and all the time my lungs are choked with fog and smoke and bad smells."

"It doesn't sound very nice," she admitted.

"It isn't!" he assured her

"And yet," she added, with a little wistful sigh, "it is London."

"It is certainly London," he declared. "It might as well be hell."

She looked at him wonderingly. After all, he must be a little mad.

"And where," she asked, reverting once more to the practical, "are you going to sleep?"

"I don't know," he answered, dreamily, "and I don't care, if only I can smell this honeysuckle all night."

"And your tea and supper?" she asked, scornfully. "Will the scent of the honeysuckle satisfy your hunger as well?"

He closed his eyes for a moment. Removed from all distractions he was forced to admit that he was hungry. "I shall go down to the inn," he decided. "I suppose there is an inn here? But you?"

She pointed downward to where the gray smoke rose in a straight, thin line from a red-tiled cottage. "There is no inn," she told him, "but my aunt will get you some tea, if you like. We often have parties."

"We will have it together, then," he begged eagerly.

A month afterward they met almost in the same place.

"Let us climb to the top and watch the reapers," he begged. "There is a field on the other side where the poppies are all in clusters, like spots of blood in a waving yellow sea. I was watching them all this morning. By tomorrow they will be gone. The men seem to creep like insects, but all the time the grain falls."

She sighed. She was dressed in black. She looked thin and there were tears in her eyes. But more wonderful still was the change in him. He carried himself like a man; a healthy tan had burned his cheeks, his eyes were bright with health. Even his voice had acquired a new firmness. The drudge was no more. The yoke of his servitude was cast aside. Tomorrow he might starve. His small savings, in fact, were almost spent. Today, at least, he was a man.

"What strange fancies you have!" she declared. "The farmers hate the poppies and these overgrown hedges which you admire so much ought all to be cut down and trimmed."

He laughed. "Give me the honeysuckle and the creeper," he declared. "I have seen enough of the ugly and the useful to last me all my life. Come, it is only a few steps farther. Give me your hand."

Breathless, they reached the summit of the hill and the shelter of the little grove of pine trees. She sat down with her back to the trunk of one of them. He threw himself by her side. Below them the slumbering landscape, warm and mellow in the afternoon sunshine, and in their faces the west wind.

"I believe in heaven," he murmured. "I have found it."

A delight, almost a fervor, was in his eyes as they wandered on and on to where the limits of his vision ended in a faint blue mist. She looked at him as one who seeks to read a book written in a strange language.

"I do not understand," she said. "It is beautiful here, I know, because everyone says so, and it is pleasant to sit and watch it all for a while. But I have sat here all my life and I am weary of it."

"Weary!" he repeated in amazement. "Weary of this country, of this life!"

"Sick to death of it!" she answered, with a vigor which was almost bluntness. Who can sit and look at one picture all their lives, however beautiful? The fields and the hedges change only from winter to summer, from summer to winter. And the people change never."

He pointed to the little graveyard away in the valley. "It is not true," he declared. "They have their joys and their sorrows also. There was merriment enough at the harvest home the other day and the whole village wept over that last little mound in the churchyard."

She shook her head impatiently. A strand or two of her hair was loosened; the sun flecked it with gold. He realized then that she was beautiful. She sat there like a self-enthroned goddess.

"The people are all very dull and very ignorant," she said. "Their lives are narrow; they sleep and they eat, and they die—but they do not live. They never live."

He was alarmed. "Go on," he said, in a low tone. "You have something in your mind?"

"It is true," she admitted. "While aunt was alive I was a prisoner. Now I am free. I want to escape."

"Escape—from here?" he murmured. "Why, this is paradise!"

She laughed softly, but with her mirth was mingled a subtle note of mockery. "You are a very foolish person," she said. "You do not know what ambition is. I do not want to sit upon the banks all my life."

"There are many who drown," he murmured.

"I will take the risk," she answered.

All the joy and freshness seemed to fade away from his face. Something of the old haggard despair came back to him. This was the end, then of all his dreams. "Yesterday," he said, in a low tone, "I walked to Market Deening. I got a situation with Sheppards, the auctioneer, and Mrs. Green, in the village, has promised me a room."

Her lirs curled a little. "If it satisfies you ——" she began.

He interrupted her. "Don't mock me!" he cried, roughly. "Nothing satisfies me if you go away. You know that."

"That is foolish," she said, "for I am most surely going away."

"To London?"

"Yes; I have written to my cousin there."

"It would have broken your aunt's heart," he said.

"Whilst she was alive I obeyed her," the girl answered, defiantly. "Now she is gone, my life is my own."

"Yes," he murmured; "yes. Our lives are all our own. See how the corn falls, Esther. They have reached the last belt, and all the poppies are gone."

II.

At first she wrote to him. He carried her letters with him backward and forward, reading them, studying them, always treasuring them. Save only for this one sorrow, the sorrow of her absence and his constant anxiety concerning her, his life had become a joy to him. His work was simple, and he did it better than it had ever been done before. His little office was bright and clean, his window looked out upon a quaint old cobbled market place. In front was a garden, bright even in these late autumn days with simple flowers. Backward and forward he walked to and from his work, and the wind and rain and sun seemed each in their turn the sweetest things he had known. He grew in stature and in breadth; the latent possibilities of his manhood asserted themselves. In the little village he became a popular person. He attempted gardening and everyone was willing to help him with advice and bulbs and the promise of seeds. He even ventured to discuss the crops with the farmers whom he met on the way. He remembered that he had once, before the evil days, called himself a Christian, and one Sunday morning he found his way to the village church. He came out with a curious sense of removal from that part of his life which was still something of a nightmare to him. Henceforth the memory of it never troubled him. He had come into real and intimate kinship with these simple folk among whom chance had brought him.

And then her letters ceased. He wrote and wrote again, but there came no reply. He bore it as well as he could, and then one day a chance remark brought the stinging color into his cheeks and his heart for a moment stood still. He applied for leave of absence and went to London.

The address which she had given him was 127 West Street, Edgware Road. But when he reached it he felt again for the letter in his pocket. No. 127 was a public house. Yet that was the number at the head of her letter. He pushed open the swing doors and entered.

There was a smell of stale beer and fresh sawdust. An unwholesome-looking youth, collarless and unwashed, was cleaning the stains of beer pots from the marble-topped tables. A couple of carmen were wrangling in a corner, a dissolute-looking person in seedy black was drinking at the counter and carrying on a desultory conversation with a young person behind the bar. Marwood addressed himself to her.

"Can you tell me if Miss Day lives here?" he asked.

The young person looked at him curiously.

"Used to," she answered, "She's gone away now."

It was true then. Esther had really lived in a place like this. He looked about him wonderingly and back at the young person behind the bar, who seemed undecided whether to resent his scrutiny or to encourage him as a possible admirer.

"Can you tell me—her present address?" he asked.

The young person jerked her head toward a swing door, leading apparently into an inner bar.

"Don't know," she said. "I dare say Mrs. Molesworth can tell you. She's in there."

Marwood pushed open the swing door. A stout, florid woman stood behind the circular counter flanked with a gorgeous array of mirrors and glasses. She was apparently engaged in the task of turning sundry black bottles upside down and holding them up to the light to estimate their contents.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I believe that Miss Day has been staying here. Can you give me her present address?"

The woman set down the particular bottle which she was examining and looked at him fixedly.

"And what might be your business with Miss Day?" she asked.

"My name is Marwood," he said. "I knew Miss Day down in Somerset."

The lady nodded her head vigorously. She became, if possible, a little redder in the face.

"Then all I can say is that it's a great pity you didn't keep her in Somerset," she answered. "What's the use of a girl like her, with scarcely a rag to her back, coming up here with such notions? Wouldn't do this and wouldn't do that—as particular and finicky all the time as you please. Drat the girl, I say, niece or no niece!"

"I am sorry," Marwood said, timidly. "I dare say it was a great change for her up here. Can you tell me where I shall find her?"

"No, I cannot," the lady answered, as though incensed at the question. "And, what's more, if I could I wouldn't, and good-day to you, sir."

She swung around and disappeared through a door leading to an inner room. Marwood left the place with hot cheeks. Some shadow of the humiliation which he could well imagine had been her lot seemed also to have fallen upon him. For two days and two nights he sought her in all manner of places and thoroughfares. Then chance befriended him. She was standing beneath a lamp post and he was in the shadow. There was no one to see the tears which filled his eyes, to hear the sob which rose hot in throat. She was tall and thin and pale. Her eyes were larger, there was a pinched look about her features. Her clothes were shabby. He thanked God for that. She was talking with a man—a gentleman, he seemed to be, well-dressed, good-humored, debonair. Marwood listened.

"And how does the show go?" the man asked her.

"Oh! I am no judge," she answered wearily. "It seems stupid enough from the wings. I am only in the chorus, you know. I have nothing to do, really."

"We are going to alter all that," the man said, swinging his cane. "I shall speak to Randall and hammer a small part out of him somehow. But, by Jove, Miss Day, you look awfully pale!"

Then Marwood saw her stumble for a moment, as though she were dizzy. She recovered herself almost immediately.

"I am—quite well," she said. "A little tired, perhaps."

The man suddenly threw away his cigarette.

"Look here, Miss Day," he said, "you've done a very foolish thing! You've missed your luncheon. You girls are always forgetting your meals. I never do. Come along. No, I insist!"

Her faint protestations were of no avail and Marwood felt the blood run cold in his veins, for he had seen for a second what no one can ever see and mistake—the wolfish gleam of hunger in her eyes, come and gone like a flash, but more eloquent than any spoken words. Then the restaurant doors before which they had been standing opened and they disappeared inside. Marwood waited. It was an hour before they came out. The transformation in her was amazing. The lines seemed to have been smoothed from her face; there was color in her cheeks and light in her eyes. Marwood, who had been standing on the opposite side of the street, started to cross the way, but he was too late. Somewhat unwillingly, it seemed to him, her companion hurried her into a hansom and followed.

Marwood caught a glimpse of the man's face under the gas lamp—it was sufficient. When the cab drew up before a row of flats a little west of Pall Mall he was already turning the corner. He saw Esther alight, hold out her hand; he could see her hesitation, her reluctant footsteps. He caught the man's eager tone as he bent over her hand—

"For a moment—not more than five minutes. I must show you the little play—and I believe that the part would suit you admirably. We will keep the hansom, if you like. I will send you home."

Marwood called out, but his voice sounded weak even to himself. The door was closed.

He leaned for a few moments against the palings. He was out of breath, and to him there had been something tragic in the disappearance of those two, the man and the girl, behind that closed door. His imagination ran rife. He saw hideous things. Almost he was ready to creep away—to escape—to forget. Then, as he returned to a more sane state of mind, he saw her as she came first to him, her hands clasped behind, her head thrown back as she walked blithely through the clover-scented meadows, humming some forgotten tune. With an oath, he trod the flags and rang the bell. A liveried servant let him in and led the way toward the lift.

"Which floor, sir?" he asked.

"I want the gentleman's rooms who has just come in with the lady," Marwood answered, his hand in his pocket.

"Mr. Borrodale—fourth floor, sir," the man remarked, closing the gates of the lift.

The man servant in plain black livery blandly denied Mr. Borrodale's presence. His coat and hat on the hall table, however, emboldened Marwood. He pushed his way in.

"It's no use; you can't see the governor!" the man declared, angrily. "Out you go!"

The veneer of civility had departed. He attempted the bully. Marwood heard a woman's cry, and he struck the man on the mouth. Then with an oak chair he thundered upon the closed door of the room from which the cry had come. A man swore and a woman sobbed. Marwood sent a panel crashing out of the door, which was suddenly thrown open. He caught one glimpse of her face, pale and terror-stricken, as she flitted by. He would have followed, but master and servant were too many for him. The latter struck him from behind, and he spent the night in a hospital. When he sought her again it was in vain.

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So Marwood returned to his country life and his routine work. One day old Mr. Sheppard, his employer, called him into his private office.

"Marwood," he said, bluntly, "I am getting on in years and I want a rest. I have saved a little and I have only my daughter to think of. Will you take the business—and marry her?"

Marwood sat still and thought. He watched the dusty floor specked into gold by a long shaft of sunlight, and he saw things there which the four walls of that room had never held. Presently he looked up.

"I want a month's holiday," he said. "When I return I will answer you."

The old man grunted, but gave his consent. Once more Marwood traveled up to London and renewed his search. This time he succeeded very easily. Esther Day was well known now. Her name and her pictures were in all the papers. She was acting at the Frivolity and she had made a "hit."

He called upon her, and he felt his courage oozing away. He felt the slow dissipation of the one romance of his life as they talked together. She was well dressed, prosperous, more beautiful than ever, with all the light smartness of the modern Londoner. To their last strange meeting she made no allusion. She gave him tea and showed him her new poodle. She talked of theatrical matters as one in the know—and to him it was jargon. When he stood up to go, he made one effort to break down the barriers which seemed to have grown up between them.

"And you have found," he asked, holding her hand for a moment, "the things you sought for?"

"I have learned wisdom," she answered. "I have learned how much to expect."

He fancied that she hurried him away. As he left the door, a brougham drove up and a young man alighted—a young man of the type he knew nothing of—immaculate in dress and person, good-looking, languid. Marwood went back to the country that night.

Yet he delayed his answer, though old Sheppard grew more and more impatient every day. Marwood passed through a curious phase of his emotional life. Mary Sheppard was pretty in her way, and waited only for him to speak. Yet he hung back with something of the feeling of a man called upon to sign his own death warrant. An impending sense of the finality of life seemed to him to be inevitably coupled with the decision which the old man and the girl were now awaiting with almost obvious eagerness. He had no great aspirations, nothing which could rank as ambitions. Yet behind the trend of his daily life, his ordinary, well-performed tasks and simple pleasures, he felt at times the dim, unrealized presence of greater things, a more quickening and satisfying life. Sometimes, in the night, he sat up in bed and stretched out his arms—for what he scarcely knew. He wandered up on the hilltop and watched the reapers. Some shadow of a far-distant, impossible dream seemed to still torment him with intangible and unsatisfying longings And all the time the old man and the girl waited, in the end they had their way.

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She came into his little office—a curiously incongruous presence in her fashionable clothes, bringing with her the subtle air of the city and of all the nameless things the presence of which had so estranged him on his last visit to her. But this time he had no consciousness of them, for she looked into his eyes and it was the look for which he had prayed so often.

"My friend," she murmured, "you were right. I am weary of it all. When you came to me I was brutal. I owe you so much, and I wanted to escape the debt. I have come to pay it, if I can."

Her hands had stolen into his. It was, after all, like a dream—a beautiful dream poignant with unutterable bitterness.

"Come out with me," she murmured. "I want you to take me through the meadows and up the hill where we watched the reapers. Will you come?"

He let fall her hands and a great sob rose to his throat.

"I cannot!" he said.

A fear stole into her eyes.

"Don't tell me that you have changed!" she pleaded.

"I have never changed," he answered, gravely; "but I am married to Mary Sheppard. It was her father's last wish, and it seemed to matter so little."

She laughed—a curious, dry, mirthless laugh.

"I hope that you will be happy," she said. "Somehow, I never thought of this. And, after all, my coming was only a whim. I must act tonight, and tomorrow, and all the days of my life."

He heard the rustling of her gown as she left him. He heard the office door swing to and close. He sat on his hard chair, and once more he looked steadily with fixed sightless eyes into that long shaft of golden dust. Then his head sank lower and lower—into his hands. He leaned forward upon the desk. Before him stretched the long, level vista of weary days—the treadmill of an unlived life. Someone shouted to him from the top of the stairs. It was like the sentence of his doom—

"Stephen, are you coming up to dinner or are you not? Everything will be cold."

He rose slowly and ascended the stairs.

THE MECHANICAL WOOING OF MISS HARDINGE---By ALFRED J. WATERHOUSE

"NO, ALPHONSE," said Miss Ethel Hardinge, and as she spoke the words she sighed gently; "it cannot be. I respect you; I hold you in the highest esteem, but I do not love you as I felt that I must love the man whom I would marry, and oh, I am so—so sorry!"

I said that I was sorry, too, and I certainly was.

"And there is no hope for me whatever?" I continued.

"I wish for your sake that there were, but—no, there is none."

"And I suppose it would be best that this should be our last meeting?" I brokenly suggested.

Again Miss Hardinge sighed. "Yes, I suppose so," she then replied, "unless—unless—if you would be willing that I should be a sister——"

I declined. I already had three or four sisters of that sort, and for some time past I have experienced an uneasy feeling lest the sister market might become overstocked. Then, having gently but firmly declined the sister proposition, I took my hat and departed for my home in the city.

But if anybody supposed that I had given up all hope of winning Miss Hardinge's hand and heart he does not know my indomitable resolution. That very evening I visited a lady who enjoys converse with the unseen world of spirits. Her revelations were marvelous—marvelous!

"I see," she said, as soon as she had gone into a trance condition. "I see a tall man dressed all in black. Do you recognize him?"

I told her that I did not; that her description still was somewhat incomplete, as numbers of my departed friends were tall and were wont to wear black clothing while still in life.

"Oh, the blindness of mortals!" murmured the medium. "The one who comes to me has a full beard. Do you recognize him now?"

It told her that I still groped.

"He says," continued the medium, "that he entered the world of spirits sixty-four years ago last November."

I tried to explain that this might account for my not recognizing a hurried description of him, but the lady paid no attention to my interruption.

"He says that he has a great-granddaughter, a most beautiful maiden, with eyes of heavenly blue and golden hair."

The wonder of the occult, the wonder! Could any description of Miss Ethel Hardinge be more surprisingly accurate? To be sure, some individuals have referred to her hair as a plain carrot red, but the lucubrations of jealous minds are unworthy of heed. For my part, I was startled by this accuracy of description.

"This great-granddaughter," the lady continued, "is in love with you." (Oh, blissful thought!) "But she does not know it." (I sighed.) "This lack of knowledge on her part is due to the machinations of an enemy of yours, a medium-sized, dark man." (Just as I suspected—that infernal Ferguson!)

"Him you will soon overcome by means of a wonderful invention which you are about to make. I see wheels and—and—things. Then you will marry the beautiful girl with the blue eyes and golden hair and will be happy. Two dollars, please."

From the latter remark, I inferred that the seance was at an end, and the inference was correct. I paid the $2 and went away greatly comforted and gladdened.

So Ethel loved me; only she did not know it. Well, mine should be the pleasing task of enlightening her and at the same time circumventing that villainous Ferguson. To that end I would invent—I would invent—well, something remarkable.

I went home and tried to think of something to invent, but it was slow work, for at first I could think of nothing but a remedy for bunions, and I could not believe that it would encourage love much.

So I thought and thought, and slowly, slowly, the great idea came to me. The medium had mentioned wheels, and from the thought of these to that of the Hindu praying wheel was a step natural and easy for the mind to take. I took it. I am aware that it is the custom of our Occidental civilization to sneer at the East Indian and his praying wheel, but I am convinced that this sneer is born of intolerant ignorance. And there is a scientific basis for this conviction, not alone in the fact that it is an acknowledged truism that millions of human beings are not likely to acknowledge a faith in which there is no grain of truth, but also because it is a demonstrable fact that mind affects mind in ways that seem to us mysterious, and it is not supposable that the minds of a multitude of people, whether expressed through praying machines or otherwise, shall have no effect on the All-Pervading Mind. Yes, the praying machine was all right—but how to apply it to Ethel Hardinge?

Slowly the thought grew. I constructed a neat machine that turned on a frame by means of a crank, and on the side of it I painted in gilt letters: "This is to convey heart thrills to Miss Ethel Hardinge only." But it was not enough; I felt that for as yet I had invented nothing; I had merely adopted an ancient idea and prepared to give it a personal application. My part must be to add to the crude faith of the Orient the scientific enlightenment of the Occident.

It came to me like a flash—apply electricity to the machine. Why not? Those mysterious vibrations which we know as the electric current are who knows how closely akin to the vibrations set in motion by the unseen force we term mind. Let me get both in operation at once on Ethel and I calculated that she would wilt and discover how much she loved me. I connected a powerful battery with the machine, and so arranged that it would be operated by the turning of the crank. Then I bribed an electrician who looked after Mr. Hardinge's electric lights to set an iron plate in the floor of Ethel's boudoir and make the necessary connections with my battery.

These arrangements completed I went to work, slowly and cautiously at first, and advancing tentatively, for I was anxious not to overdo the job. The first petitions I used in my machine were three in number, and they read as follows:

"Will you not be mine?"

"Do you not love me?"

"Oh, say that you do!"

Then I set my mind to sending thought thrills through the machine, and I knew that the battery was working at the same time. Of course, I could not be sure that the latter always was taking effect on Ethel, but as I made it a point always to have it in operation about her bedtime I was confident that she must have some queer sensations. At the end of three days I received from her a note reading as follows:

"Friend Alphonso: Perhaps I should not say it, for I still feel that my refusal of you was wise, but I wish that we might see each other occasionally. I have been surprised to find how much your dear, brotherly presence meant to me. I lie awake and think of you after I have gone to bed. Doubtless it is better as it is, but if you only would permit me to be a sister to you. Ever your friend. ETHEL."

I had Rogers incidentally mention to Miss Hardinge that I had gone out of town for three or four days. Then I added a little to the force of the battery and changed the sentences in the machine to the following:

"You will be mine."

"You cannot refuse."

"Oh, hesitate no longer."

I pleaded sickness to Ketcham & Pullem as an excuse for staying away from the office, and for the next few days I devoted my time exclusively to winning Miss Hardinge's youthful affections. I kept the machine going so continuously that I began to fear it would be destroyed by fire generated by friction. The only sleep I took was between 2:30 and 8:30 a. m., the hours when I supposed that my darling's little feet would be least likely to come in contact with the electrified plate. With the exception of these few hours I worked constantly, and if Miss Hardinge experienced no peculiar thrills I could not blame myself. I was becoming thin under this constant regimen, but what would be a lack of flesh to the man who should know the transport of reciprocated love?

Thank heaven, my unwearying effort was not in vain. At the end of four days I received the following note from Ethel:

"My Dear Alphonso: How can I tell you how this strange silence and weary separation are blighting my young life? I know that I am to blame, yet as I sit in my boudoir and dream of you the most delightful thrills pervade my entire being at thought of all that you might have been to me had I not realized that it would be better otherwise. I cannot absolutely regret this decision, and yet—and yet—oh, that we again might sit together in brotherly and sisterly commune! Oh, do not say that it may not be. Affectionately, your more than sister, ETHEL."

I hesitated before acting upon this note She was yielding to the machine; I could see that; but had the time come for me to take advantage of this softening process? Probably it had not; a few more thrills could do no harm, anyway. I added one-half horsepower to the force of the battery and substituted the following sentences for those already in the wheel:

"You love me."

"You know that you do."

"Oh, confess it, and be happy with me."

"Down with Ferguson!"

"Let him triumph no longer."

Then I went to work. Ah, how I did perspire over that machine! I felt myself wearing away, but with her sweet love almost won to cheer me on the labor became one of joy, and every drop of perspiration was as a globule of distilled bliss. At the end of but two days I received another note from Ethel. Ah, with what madness of happiness my heart throbbed as I read:

"My Darling Alphonso: I had almost written 'my own,' but an unhappy ghost of fear haunts and holds me, and over and over I say to myself, 'Perhaps he has changed; perhaps he loves me no longer.' Else why this bitter, changeless silence? But I will not believe it; I will not, for, should I do so, I would be the most unhappy of women. Nor can I believe that the indescribable thrill which begins at my feet, nestles about my heart, and mounts to my brain as I sit in my boudoir and think of you, can have been born only to droop and die. Come to me, my own dear Alphonso, and I shall have something to say to you that will surprise and, I trust, gladden you. Lovingly longingly, yours, ETHEL."

Within half an hour from the time when I received that note I was in the sitting room of Mr. Darius Hardinge's residence, and my Ethel was with me. The scene that ensued was too sacred to be depicted for the callous multitude but Ethel and I were severed no longer—not noticeably so. At last she raised her fair head from my shoulder and looked at me.

"Oh, my darling, my own," she said. "I cannot describe the thrills of longing for you that I have known, and you—why, you actually have lost flesh. You, too, have suffered from this cruel separation, my love."

I admitted that I had fallen off, but I neglected to mention some of the apparent reasons.

Ethel and I are to be married on August 26.

There is one thing further that I desire to mention before closing this simple, truthful narrative. I do not wish Ethel ever to know about my machine, as I fear that she might feel some maidenly scruples about having been woed and won by machinery. Under these circumstances I naturally wish to dispose of the machine, and I will sell it for $1,000. It should be worth that amount of any ardent swain's money just to experience the happiness that Ethel and I are to know after August 26. I would make a slight reduction for cash, but not more than 5 per cent.

Ah, these days of courtship! They are as an ocean of bliss surrounding the bright islands of anticipation, and over that ocean Ethel and I are sailing unto our golden time.—New York Times.

THE GOSPEL OF MUST.

There is work in the world for the toiler or dreamer
And the work that's at hand is the work he should do;
And whether the toiler's mechanic or schemer
The result is the crystallized "thing that he knew."
Let the thing be a good thing the world is the better—
If bad 'tis a pity the tools did not rust.
Good, bad, or indifferent, man is the debtor
(So he'll tell you at times) of the Gospel of Must.

"I just had to do it!" cries weak-kneed offender
'Gainst morality's laws, when he's called to account.
"I had to!" the borrower says to the lender—
So do instances rise—there are any amount.
Cruel fate is most kind in providing excuses
For weak, foolish men who lie prone in the dust—
And, while helping the wicked and foolish, traduces
A great and wise message, the Gospel of Must.

The wise man must give of his wisdom to many;
The man with great gifts always must pass them on.
The good man forbears doing evil to any—
Always must do what's right, and bid evil begone.
Grim necessity cruelly tries every fellow
Who walks 'neath her banner. Ah, heartless her thrust!
You must do right or wrong! You must be red or yellow—.
So the weaklings are killed by the Gospel of Must!

—Pittsburg Dispatch.